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PATENT

**SELF-CONTAINED ASSAY DEVICE FOR RAPID DETECTION OF
BIOHAZARDOUS AGENTS**

15

CROSS REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

This application claims priority to U.S. Provisional Application No. 60/448,034, filed March 20, 2003, which is incorporated herein by reference in its entirety.

TECHNICAL FIELD OF THE INVENTION

20 The invention relates to devices and methods for detecting the presence of a ligand in a sample, more specifically for detecting a biohazardous agent in a sample. More particularly, the invention relates to a self-contained cassette comprising a liquid crystal, and methods of using such cassette to analyze test samples. A sample is introduced into the device and tested therein for the presence of a ligand in the sample, wherein interaction and complex formation between
25 the ligand and its receptor is detected. The detection means comprises a liquid crystal matrix which undergoes detectable distortion in its orientational order in the presence of ligand/receptor complex aggregates. The invention also relates to devices that provide the force to move the sample through the assay cassette.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

Early detection of threat agents can be a great benefit in either disease prophylaxis or therapy before symptoms appear or worsen. Examples of ligand/receptor detection systems for identifying threat agents include, but are not limited to, detection of a pathogenic agent such as a 5 microbe by an antibody, or of a toxin by an antibody, or detection of an antibody in blood by another antibody, or binding of a chemical toxin, such as nerve gas, to its receptor.

U.S. Patent No. 6,171,802 by Woolverton, Niehaus, Doane, Lavrentovich, Schmidt and Signs, discloses a system for detecting selective binding of a ligand to a receptor and producing an amplified optical signal as the formed receptor-ligand aggregate distorts the orientation of a 10 surrounding liquid crystal matrix (**Figure 1** of this application). The system comprises a receptor (e.g., mono-specific antibody), a ligand (e.g., the specific pathogenic agent that binds to the antibody), and a liquid crystalline material. Under baseline conditions, a uniform nematic liquid crystal slab is positioned between two glass plates whose surfaces are treated to uniformly align the liquid crystal (**Figure 8**). The resulting cassette is viewed between two polarizers, a 15 director and an analyzer, with the analyzer oriented 90° out of phase with the director. The easy axis orientation of the liquid crystal matrix (i.e., the direction of positional orientation of the liquid crystal) is aligned with the director and light is projected through the device. Since the analyzer is perpendicular to the polarization of light, light is not transmitted across the uniformly aligned detection system and the cassette appears dark. Under assay conditions, however, the 20 receptor-ligand aggregates, also referred to as inclusion bodies, become embedded in the liquid crystal matrix and induce director distortions in that matrix. The magnitude of director distortion is determined by the balance of the liquid crystal-to-particle anchoring energy versus the elastic energy of director distortions in the liquid crystal bulk. Both anchoring energy and elastic energy are affected by particle size such that individual ligands or receptors are too small to 25 induce detectable distortions, i.e., particle diameter (d) is less than the critical detectable diameter (d_c). Larger particles, ligand aggregates for example, that exceed the critical diameter will cause the adjacent liquid crystal to deviate from its original uniform orientation. The distorted zone will permit light transmission and will appear as an optically detectable bright spot.

U.S. Patent Application Publication No. 2002/0052002, by Niehaus, Woolverton, Lavrentovich, Ishikawa and Doane, discloses an additional system and methods for amplifying receptor-ligand binding to enhance detection signals created in the liquid crystal. The system and method comprise a generally spherical particle capable of binding to the desired ligand. The 5 diameter of the individual spherical particle is less than the critical diameter (d_c) and thus does not initiate a detectable optical signal. In one embodiment, the generally spherical particle is coated with a receptor that specifically binds to the ligand (e.g. a microsphere coated with an antibody specific for the ligand; **Figures 2A and 2B**). In another embodiment, the system comprises an antibody specific for the ligand, such antibody not being attached to the generally 10 spherical particle. In this latter embodiment, a generally spherical particle is also provided that is coated with a receptor for the antibody (e.g., a microsphere coated with anti-immunoglobulin). The system also comprises a liquid crystalline material. In the absence of a ligand to which the antibody binds, the liquid crystalline material assumes an ordered orientation (**Figure 3A**), and polarized light directed through the system, similar to the description above (**Figure 1A**), does 15 not reach a light detector. However, in the presence of a ligand to which the antibody can bind, the microsphere-antibody-ligand complex becomes large enough to exceed the critical diameter, distorts the liquid crystalline material (**Figure 3B**), and allows local transmission of light to the photodetector (**Figure 1B**). The generally spherical particle thus significantly enhances formation of detectable ($d >> d_c$) microsphere-antibody-ligand aggregates when ligand 20 concentrations are low.

The systems and methods described in the art do not provide for a self-contained system in which the sample is efficiently mixed with assay components (i.e., receptors and liquid crystalline material) and then analyzed for the presence of complexes between ligand and receptor. There is a need for self-contained systems for rapid and sensitive detection of ligands 25 that can be processed automatically.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

The present invention relates to a self-contained device, called an assay cassette, for rapid, safe, and automatic detection of biohazardous ligands. The cassette comprises one or more mixing chambers configured for mixing various assay components with an introduced 30 sample, such assay components being a receptor (e.g., an antibody) capable of binding to the

ligand, an optional generally spherical particle capable of binding to the receptor (e.g., microspheres coated with antibody); and a liquid crystalline material. The device is configured to provide for turbulent flow of the sample and assay components such that there is mixing between the sample and assay components. The device also comprises detection chambers into which the sample that has been mixed with the assay components (i.e., mixed sample) flows. The device is also configured to provide for laminar flow of the mixed sample into the detection chambers such that the liquid crystalline material assumes a uniform alignment with the director except when adjacent to an inclusion body whose diameter exceeds the critical diameter ($d >> d_c$), e.g., surrounding immune aggregates. The local liquid crystal distortions allow transmission of spots of polarized light through the detection chamber for identification by a photodetector.

The present invention also relates to a device, called a flow device that is in operational communication with the assay cassette. The flow device is programmed to provide a force that moves the sample through the assay cassette and causes mixing of the sample with the assay components. The flow device is also programmed to provide laminar flow of the mixed sample within the detection chamber.

The present invention also relates to a kit comprising an assay cassette and one or more of the following: a system for preparing a sample for introduction into the assay cassette, a flow device, and a device for detecting a signal that is transmitted through the detection chamber of the assay cassette (i.e., a reader device).

The present invention also relates to methods for detecting ligands in a sample. The methods generally comprise introduction of a sample into the cassette, application of a force to move the sample though the cassette, first, such that turbulent flow of the sample and assay components provide mixing of these components and, second, such that flow of the mixed sample into the detection chambers is laminar, for detection of a complex between ligand and receptor.

There are numerous embodiments of the methods and devices described herein, all of which are intended to be non-limiting examples. Additional features and advantages of the invention will be set forth in part in the description which follows, and in part will be obvious from the description, or may be learned by practice of the invention. The features and

advantages of the invention will be realized and attained by means of the elements and combinations particularly pointed out in the appended claims.

It is to be understood that both the foregoing general description and the following detailed description are exemplary and explanatory only and are not restrictive of the invention,
5 as claimed.

The accompanying drawings, which are incorporated in and constitute a part of this specification, illustrate several embodiments of the invention, and together with the description, serve to explain the principles of the invention.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE FIGURES

10 While the specification concludes with claims particularly pointing out and distinctly claiming the invention, it is believed that the present invention will be better understood from the following description taken in conjunction with the accompanying drawings in which:

Figure 1A is a schematic representation of an amplification mechanism with a receptor inserted into the lyotropic liquid crystal. See U.S. Patent No. 6,171,802.

15 **Figure 1B** is a schematic representation of an amplification mechanism with the specific ligand bound to its receptor causing deformation of the liquid crystal and alteration of the transmission of polarized light. See U.S. Patent No. 6,171,802.

20 **Figure 2A** is a schematic representation of a microsphere having a plurality of receptors (i.e., antibodies) attached to the outer surface of the microsphere. See U.S. Patent Application Publication No. 2002/0052002.

Figure 2B is a schematic representation of a microsphere having a plurality of receptors attached to the outer surface of the microsphere with ligand bound to a portion of the receptors. See U.S. Patent Application Publication No. 2002/0052002.

25 **Figure 3A** is a schematic representation of a microsphere having a plurality of receptors (i.e., antibodies) attached to the outer surface of the microsphere showing the liquid crystalline material orientation about the receptor-bound sphere. See U.S. Patent Application Publication No. 2002/0052002.

Figure 3B is a schematic representation of multiple microspheres having a plurality of receptors attached to the outer surface of the microsphere with ligand of a pathogen bound to a portion of receptors on each microsphere, showing the change in liquid crystalline material orientation about the sphere when ligand is bound.

5 **Figure 4** is a schematic representation of a cassette embodiment for testing a sample for multiple ligands, each tested using a different antibody. This embodiment provides a cassette that can be used to assay several samples before being replaced. A disinfectant is automatically flushed through the cassette between samples. A buffer is also flushed through the lines to remove the disinfectant. The next sample is then introduced into and run through the system.

10 Flow of the sample through this system is provided by a pump.

Figure 5 is a schematic representation of an assay cassette embodiment for testing a sample for the presence of multiple ligands.

Figure 6 is an embodiment for an one-way injection valve for the assay cassette.

15 **Figure 7** is a schematic representation of another embodiment for an assay cassette. In this embodiment, assay components are held within holding chambers that comprise blister packs. The blister packs release the assay components as the sample flows through the assay cassette.

Figure 8 is a schematic representation of a detection chamber of the assay cassette.

20 **Figure 9** is a schematic representation of the arrangement of the detection chamber, polarizers, light source and light detector in the assay cassette setup.

Figure 10 is a schematic representation of one embodiment of a roller device, here being used with a collapsible blister pack assay cassette.

Figure 11 is a schematic representation of another embodiment of a roller device.

25 **Figure 12** is a schematic representation of a filtration system for removing particulate material from a sample before it is introduced into the assay cassette.

Figure 13 is a schematic representation of detection of aggregates in a detection chamber.

Figure 14 shows the effect of immune complex size on director distortions in the surrounding LCLC. Left column contains fluorescence confocal microscopy textures and the right column contains the corresponding polarizing microscope textures. Small aggregates (A) with $d < d_c$, where $d_c \approx 2\mu m$, did not cause director distortions (B). Aggregates of size $d \approx d_c$ (C) gave rise to minimally detectable distortions (D). Aggregates exceeding the critical radius, $d > d_c$, (E) caused substantial director distortions readily visualized by polarizing microscopy (F).

Figure 15 shows normalized light transmission, I_N , through a 15 μm thick LCLC sample in the polarizing-microscope mode as the function of size (average diameter) of the immune complex. The inset shows the signal intensity created by a $\sim 4 \mu m$ diameter aggregate in a 50 μm x 50 μm area of LCLC. The signal amplitude (insert) is an order of magnitude higher than the background.

Figure 16 shows detection of Bacteria-Antibody Complexes. Polarizing micrographs of LCLC with added E. coli and antibody (A); E. coli only (B); antibody only (C). An immune aggregate was associated with the area of light transmission in (A).

Figure 17 shows detection of Virus-Antibody Complexes. Polarizing micrographs of Vaccinia virus with antibody (A), Vaccinia only (B), and antibody only (C) in 13% (w/w) cromolyn. Note the elongated immune aggregate of Vaccinia virus and associated light transmission in (A).

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

Reference will now be made in detail to the present embodiments (exemplary embodiments) of the invention, examples of which are illustrated in the accompanying figures.

Assay Cassettes

The present invention provides for a device that is a closed system for assaying or detecting the presence of a ligand in a sample in a rapid and safe manner. Herein, “closed system” means that after the sample is introduced into the device, the person who is performing the assay, the operator, is not exposed to the sample or any agents within the sample. Such an assay device is called an “assay cassette.” The ligand sought to be detected using the cassette is

preferably part of, or attached to, a biohazardous agent (e.g., a pathogenic microorganism), or a toxin. The closed system property of the cassette is advantageous because it minimizes contact of the sample with the operator.

A highly schematic representation of an assay cassette is shown in **Figure 4**. The cassette is generally a linear flow system, such that the introduced sample flows through the cassette and is sequentially mixed with various assay components, such as receptors (i.e., antibodies that specifically bind to the ligand in the sample), generally spherical particles (e.g., microspheres) capable of binding to the antibodies, and liquid crystalline materials. The assay components are preferably enclosed within the assay cassette. In one embodiment, the flow channels are in the form of discrete modules which may be combined in an array, and may optionally be housed in a cassette. The mixing occurs through turbulent flow of the sample and assay components, which flow is provided by the embodiment of the cassette. After the addition and mixing of the assay components with the sample, the design of the assay cassette provides for laminar flow of the mixed sample into a detection chamber. In the presence of ligand/receptor complex aggregates, the orientational order of the liquid crystalline material surrounding the complex is distorted, and allows polarized light to be transmitted through the detection chamber. In the absence of a complex between a ligand and a receptor, the orientational order of the liquid crystalline material is not distorted, and polarized light is not transmitted through the detection chamber.

In one embodiment, the schematic representation of an assay cassette is as shown in **Figure 5**. The cassette shown in **Figure 5** is in the size range of 1 to 6 inches long by 0.5 to 6 inches wide and is preferably in the range less than 0.01 to about 1 inch thick, and is more preferably less than 0.5 inches thick. In one preferred embodiment, the cassette has a trapezoidal shape. One parallel side of the trapezoid (i.e., the longer of the two parallel sides) is at the top end of the cassette and is the side at which the injection port is located. The shorter parallel side of the trapezoid cassette is located at the bottom end of the cassette and is the side at which the detection chamber is located. The trapezoidal shape of the cassette in this particular embodiment facilitates correct insertion of the assay cassette into the chamber of the flow device, which is discussed later. The assay cassette is made from a material such as plastic or glass. Preferably, the assay cassette (except for the detection chamber) is made from plastic. In one embodiment the assay cassette has an upper and a lower layer. The upper layer can be hard plastic, such as

polystyrene. Preferably, the bottom layer is a softer type of plastic, such as polypropylene, or another a type of collapsible plastic (e.g., blister pack material). The collapsible plastic lower layer is attached to the hard plastic top layer in such a way as to form discrete walls and chambers (**Figures 5 and 7**). The detection chamber of the assay cassette comprises on at least
5 two opposing sides low or non birefringent glass.

The assay cassette comprises at least one walled, continuous area interior to the cassette through which a sample is flowable. Optionally, collapsible walls may be located between the chambers to prevent flow there through except when the device is in operation. The assay cassette has a first and a second end. The continuous area begins at a first end of the cassette
10 where a port is located. The port preferably has a one-way valve providing liquid communication between the exterior of the cassette and the continuous area interior to the cassette. As part of the continuous area interior to the cassette, there is at least one mixing chamber in fluid communication with the port. In one embodiment of the assay cassette, a first conduit provides liquid communication between the port and a first mixing chamber, and also
15 provides for turbulent flow of the sample through the conduit. Mixing chambers provide for mixing of the sample with one or more assay components. The mixing chamber preferably provides turbulent flow of the sample and assay components that leads to their mixing. In another embodiment of the assay cassette, there is a second mixing chamber in liquid communication with the first mixing chamber. In this embodiment, a second conduit may
20 provide the liquid communication between the first and second mixing chambers. In still another embodiment of the assay cassette, there is a third mixing chamber in liquid communication with the second mixing chamber. A third conduit may provide the liquid communication between the second and third mixing chambers. The second and third conduits, if present, provide for turbulent flow of the sample through the conduits. The continuous area ends at the second end of
25 the assay cassette where there is a detection chamber in fluid communication, optionally, via a conduit, with the mixing chamber that is nearest the second end of the assay cassette. Depending on the particular embodiment of the assay cassette, the mixing chamber nearest the second end of the cassette may be different. For example, in an assay cassette having one mixing chamber, there is fluid communication between the single mixing chamber (i.e., the first mixing chamber)
30 and the detection chamber. In an assay cassette having two mixing chambers, there is fluid communication between the second mixing chamber and the detection chamber. In an assay

cassette having three mixing chambers, there is fluid communication between the third mixing chamber and the detection chamber. The fluid communication between the mixing chamber nearest the second end of the cassette and the detection chamber may be provided by a fourth conduit which provides for laminar flow of the sample and mixed assay components into the
5 detection chamber.

The design of the assay cassette provides for introduction of a fluid sample, turbulent flow of the sample through the cassette in such a way that the sample is mixed with assay components, then laminar flow of the sample mixed with the assay components (i.e., the mixed sample) into a detection chamber of the cassette. This is described in more detail later.

10 The sample that is to be tested for the presence of a ligand is introduced into the cassette through a sample or injection port or valve attached the top end of the device. In the particular embodiment shown in **Figure 5**, the port is attached to a sample chamber. The port where the sample is introduced into the cassette is of a design such that once the sample is introduced into the device, the sample or its contents do not escape from the cassette and contact with the
15 operator, for example. In one embodiment, the port is a rubber barrier through which a needle attached to a syringe is inserted, and the plunger of the syringe is depressed for the purpose of expelling the sample contained within the syringe into the sample chamber of the assay cassette. Upon removal of the needle from the port, expansion of the rubber to occlude the hole where the needle had been inserted prevents flow of sample out of the cassette. In a second embodiment
20 (**Figure 6**), a syringe configured with a male leur-lock end is used to deliver the sample into the chamber. A female leur-lock surrounds the opening to the collection chamber. A spring inside the chamber applies pressure to a tapered plug and causes the plug to occlude the chamber opening. The syringe male leur-lock is inserted into the female leur-lock and rotated to establish a tight seal between the syringe and chamber. The contents of the syringe are pressurized when
25 the plunger of the syringe is depressed. The sample is expelled into the chamber when the hydrostatic pressure in the syringe exceeds the recoil pressure of the spring. The syringe hydrostatic pressure drops as the sample is expelled, and the spring forces the plug back into the sealed configuration. Other designs for one-way ports are possible, and are known in the art.

30 In one embodiment of the cassette device, the sample is initially introduced into a sample chamber. The sample chamber is a type of holding area for the sample, where the sample is held

before subsequent steps are initiated that cause the sample to flow through the device and mix with the various assay components. The sample chamber may also act as an area where the sample is divided into portions for the purpose of contacting each portion of the sample with a separate set of assay components, especially different receptors. Such cassettes that contain
5 multiple receptors are described later.

Mixing Chambers

After introduction into the cassette, the sample flows into mixing areas, called mixing chambers. Mixing chambers are areas in the assay cassette where the sample contacts and mixes with one or more assay components. A mixing chamber comprises at least two walls which
10 define a void, or hollow area, that is generally spherical, elliptical, tubular, or hemispheric in shape. The hollow interior allows two or more fluids to contact each other and be mixed with one another. Generally, the hollow interior defines a void volume large enough to accommodate an increase in volume that occurs when an assay component is added to the sample portion in the assay cassette. As described below, a mixing chamber may have vortex-producing components
15 or structures that induce turbulence to facilitate mixing.

Generally, a single mixing chamber is used to mix a sample portion with each assay component (e.g., antibody, optional microspheres and liquid crystalline material). The embodiment shown in **Figure 5** is such a design where there are separate mixing chambers for mixing the sample with a receptor antibody, microspheres, and liquid crystalline material. Other
20 designs are possible. In another embodiment, a mixing chamber is used to mix more than one assay component with the sample. In one embodiment, a single mixing chamber is used to mix a sample portion with a receptor and microspheres, and a second mixing chamber is used to mix the sample/receptor/microsphere complex with a liquid crystalline material.

Mixing chambers may or may not enclose one or more assay components. In one
25 embodiment, an assay component is held or stored within the mixing chamber (**Figure 5**). In one embodiment, there is a compartment within the mixing chamber, such as a blister pack, that holds the assay component and then releases the component to mix with the sample portion as the sample portion flows into the assay chamber. In another embodiment, the assay component added to the sample portion is not enclosed with the mixing chamber per se, but is enclosed
30 within a separate chamber which may be within or outside of the assay cassette, called a holding

chamber, for example (**Figure 7**). In this embodiment, the assay component is flowed into the mixing chamber from the holding chamber at or before the time when the sample reaches the mixing area. The holding chamber may itself be a blister pack that holds the assay component and then releases the component to mix with the sample portion as the sample portion flows into
5 the mixing chamber. In another embodiment, the assay component is not per se enclosed within the cassette, but is flowed into the mixing chamber from outside the cassette at or before the time at which the sample flows into the particular chamber. The various embodiments of mixing chambers, and/or adjacent conduit sections, provide for turbulent flow to facilitate mixing the sample with the assay components, as described above.

10 As described earlier, the assay components used in the inventive assay cassette include receptors, such as antibodies, optional microspheres capable of binding to the receptors, and liquid crystalline materials. As described above, there is preferably a separate mixing chamber for each individual assay component. For example, there is a first mixing chamber for mixing of receptor with the sample. There is an optional, separate second mixing chamber for mixing of
15 microspheres with the sample/receptor mix. There is a separate third mixing chamber for mixing of the liquid crystalline material with the sample/receptor/microsphere mix. Each mixing chamber is ordered in the order in which the particular assay component is to contact and mix with the sample. For example, in the case where a receptor is to be mixed with the sample first, microspheres mixed with the sample second, and liquid crystalline material mixed with the
20 sample third, there are three mixing chambers ordered along the length of the path through which the sample flows. In moving from the sample chamber to the detection chamber, the order of the mixing areas along the length of the conduit is the receptor mixing chamber, the microsphere mixing chamber, and the liquid crystalline mixing chamber, respectively. **Figure 5** shows that there is a separate “set” of mixing chambers for each receptor with which the sample, or sample
25 portion, is mixed. In **Figure 5**, a “set” of mixing chambers comprises a mixing chamber for mixing of the sample portion with a receptor (designated as “1” in **Figure 5**), a second mixing chamber for mixing of the sample portion that has already been mixed with receptor with microspheres (designated as “3” in **Figure 5**), then a third mixing chamber for mixing of the sample portion-receptor-microsphere mixture with a liquid crystalline material (designated as
30 “4” in **Figure 5**). In other embodiments, a “set” of mixing chambers may comprise a first chamber for mixing the sample portion with receptor and a second chamber for mixing the

sample portion-receptor mixture with a liquid crystalline material. As is described below, each set of mixing chambers has a separate detection chamber into which the mixed sample flows for signal detection.

5 Optionally, there are additional sets of mixing chambers for various positive and negative controls. In one embodiment, for example, there are separate sets of mixing chambers for mixing of a sample portion with different receptors specific for a biohazardous agent. There is an additional set of mixing chambers for a sample portion which is not mixed with a receptor (negative control). There are two additional sets of mixing chambers for mixing a known ligand (e.g., *E. coli* bacterium) with a receptor (e.g., an antibody) known to react with the known ligand 10 (i.e., a positive control) and with a receptor known not to react with the known ligand (i.e., a second negative control).

Detection Chambers

The assay cassette also comprises one or more detection chambers (Figure 8). There is a 15 separate detection chamber for each set of mixing chambers. The mixed sample portion (i.e., a sample portion which has been mixed with the entire assay components used in the assay) flows into the detection chamber. In a preferred embodiment, the detection chambers are located at the opposite end of the assay cassette relative to where the sample is introduced (i.e., where the sample port is located). In one preferred embodiment, a detection chamber is adjacent to the 20 mixing chamber used for mixing the liquid crystalline material with the sample. The detection chamber is preferably attached to the mixing chamber by a conduit which provides laminar flow of the mixed sample into the detection chamber (discussed below). The detection chamber is constructed of low birefringence glass on at least two opposing walls. In use, polarized light is directed at one wall of low or non birefringent glass and a detector is positioned adjacent to the 25 opposing low or non birefringent glass wall to facilitate detection of light transmitted through the detection chamber. Preferably, the interior surfaces of the opposing low or non birefringent glass walls of the detection chamber (e.g., the base and top of the chamber through which polarized light is directed) are coated with an ~380 nm thick polyimide film which has been surface treated to create parallel, charged microgrooves for facilitating orientational order of the liquid 30 crystalline material (described below). Such microgrooves are parallel to each other and aligned with the flow of the mixed sample into the detection chamber along the axis that is parallel to the

direction of flow through the cassette. There are a variety of ways to make such microgrooves. In one method, a laser is used to etch the microgrooves into the surface of the low or non birefringent glass. In another method, the glass is spin-coated with a polyimid, which is normally baked (e.g., 180°C for 1 hour) onto the interior surface of the glass, and which has been
5 rubbed in the direction of sample flow. In another method, microgrooves are formed by rubbing the surface with a cloth material; good results have been obtained using felt. Formation of microgrooves on the interior surface of the detection chamber, the length of which are in the same direction as the mixed sample flowing into the chamber, facilitate alignment of the liquid crystalline material. The detection chamber preferably holds a volume of the mixed sample that
10 is between 0.05 µl and 100 µl , and more preferably between 5 µl and 25 µl. In one embodiment, the interior of the detection chamber is 30 mm long by 15 mm wide and holds a volume of 15 µl of fluid. In another embodiment, the interior of the detection chamber is 10 mm long by 10 mm wide and holds a volume of ~5 µl of fluid.

In a preferred embodiment, the two walls of the detection chamber through which
15 polarized light is directed, contain light polarizing film attached to the exterior surfaces. The particular side wall closest to the light source has the attached polarizing film aligned with the longitudinal axis of the detection chamber. That is, the polarizing film is attached to the surface of the side wall closest to the light source such that the light, after passing through the first (i.e., director) polarizer, is polarized in the same direction as the microgrooves (along the “easy axis”)
20 on the interior surface of the detection chamber; this is also the same direction as the sample flow into the detection chamber). The particular side wall farthest from the light source (and closest to the detector) has the attached polarizing film (i.e., analyzer) aligned perpendicular to the longitudinal axis of the detection chamber.

Connection of Mixing Chambers and Detection Chamber

25 The assay cassette is designed such that the sample, after introduction into the cassette, flows from one mixing chamber to the next, and then to the detection chamber. In one embodiment of the assay cassette, the separate mixing chambers are located adjacent to one another. In one embodiment, the detection chamber is located adjacent to the last mixing chamber in a set of mixing chambers. In other embodiments, the mixing and detection chambers
30 are not located directly adjacent to one another, but are interconnected by conduits, causeways,

channels, tubes or cylinders (“conduits”) (designated as “2” in **Figure 5**). There may be one conduit positioned between chambers, or a plurality of conduits in series between two chambers. Not all chambers need be connected by conduits, for example, there may be one or more conduits between the inlet port and a mixing chamber, no conduits between two or more mixing 5 chambers, and one conduit between the final mixing chamber and the detection chamber.

The interior areas of conduits are preferably substantially tubular in shape, however they may be elliptical or semi-hemispheric. Conduits may have substantially smooth inner surfaces, or they may comprise structures which influence the flow pattern of fluid moving through the cassette during operation, such that the flow is substantially turbulent. Conduits situated 10 between the final mixing chamber and the detection chamber are preferably smooth on their interior surfaces, and adapted to influence a flow pattern that is substantially laminar when the device is in use. Conduits may have varied internal diameters and dimensions that are either the same as or differ from the internal diameters or dimensions of adjacent conduits or chambers.

The conduits allow the sample portion, and the sample portion mixed with the various 15 assay components, to flow through the assay cassette. In one embodiment, one end of a first conduit is attached to a port which is used for introduction of the sample into the assay cassette. The second end of the first conduit is attached to a first mixing chamber. A second conduit connects the first mixing chamber and a second mixing chamber. A third conduit similarly interconnects the second mixing chamber and, either a third mixing chamber, or a detection 20 chamber. In another embodiment, a sample chamber is attached to a first mixing chamber by a first conduit. A second conduit attaches or interconnects the first mixing chamber to a second mixing chamber. A third conduit interconnects the second mixing chamber to a third mixing chamber. A fourth conduit interconnects the third mixing chamber to a detection chamber. Other embodiments are possible. It is noted that an assay cassette embodiment with multiple sets 25 of mixing chambers and multiple detection chambers, such as the embodiment shown in **Figure 5**, is advantageous in that a different receptor or antibody can be reacted with each sample portion. In the case, shown in **Figure 5** for example, a separate portion of the introduced sample is reacted with up to nine receptors. A positive and negative control would each require one detection chamber. If each of the seven remaining antibodies is specific for a different pathogen, 30 for example, the introduced sample is assayed for the presence of seven different pathogens or biohazards. Other cassette embodiments assay for less than seven pathogens or more than seven

pathogens.

Chambers and conduits may have gates or valves at their connection interfaces. Such gates or valves operate to prevent the flow of assay components and samples through the system except when in operation. They may also operate to prevent the back flow of assay components
5 and sample mixes toward the first end of the assay cassette when the device is in operation. Gates or valves may be solid structures, the movement or displacement of which may be actuated by various means. In one embodiment, a gate may be a flap that is held in place to prevent the flow of fluid until pressure is applied to the flow path or one or more of the chambers or conduits. Such a flap may be one-way, in that it remains open only when flow is in the direction
10 from the first end of the assay cassette toward the second end, and is closed when the pressure is toward the first end. In another embodiment, a gate or valve may take the form of a soluble membrane which dissolves in the presence of a solvent that is added to the system via the inlet port. An example of such a solvent is water. A variety of gates and valves are known in the art for use in fluid flow systems and devices.

15 Flow within the Assay Cassette

The assay cassette is configured such that, at or before the point where the sample portion, or a sample portion mixed with one or more assay components, comes in contact with an assay component, there is turbulent flow that provides for mixing of the sample portion with the assay components. Turbulent flow is characterized by the presence of random local circular currents called vortices. In the presence of such vortices, there is transfer of fluid (i.e., mixing)
20 between the solution containing the sample and the solution containing the particular assay component. Turbulent flow can be described through the use of a dimensionless parameter called the "Reynolds number." The Reynolds number is equal to the product of fluid density, the average forward velocity of fluid and the diameter of the conduit through which the fluid flows,
25 divided by fluid viscosity. Generally, a Reynolds number of above approximately 2000 indicates turbulent flow.

There are a variety of methods for creating turbulent flow. The preferred embodiment of the assay cassettes of the present invention uses elements such as moving, or more preferably, non-moving baffles, blades, ribs, bars, and the like, present within mixing chambers or conduits
30 that generally disrupt the flow of the sample portion and assay components by causing shearing,

swirling or change of direction of the sample portion and assay components, for example (designated as “2a” in **Figure 5**). Such elements are called vortex-producing elements. These elements are placed in the path of the flowing fluid, by locating the elements inside the conduits and/or mixing chambers. Through the use and placement of these elements, the cassette design 5 provides for either or both of: i) turbulent flow of the sample and the assay component, and subsequent contacting of the turbulently flowing sample and assay component that results in mixing, and ii) contacting of the sample and assay component and production of subsequent turbulent flow that results in mixing of the sample and assay components.

There are devices known in the art as “static mixers” which provide a variety of ways for 10 mixing different components, such as different fluids or fluid mixtures, together to form a homogeneous mass. Such additional method known in the art of static mixers can be used to provide the turbulent flow of the inventive assay cassettes.

One way to determine whether the design of the assay cassette provides turbulent flow sufficient for mixing of sample and assay components in the assay cassette is determined by 15 adding a number of microbeads (1-2 μm) to the sample that is introduced into the cassette or to a given assay component that is introduced into the system. The microbeads provide a visual marker to what happens to the particular fluid, whether sample or assay component. Mixing of the microbeads is visualized, with or without use of a low-power microscope, as the sample flows through the cassette. In the case where the design of the particular assay cassette provides 20 turbulent flow sufficient for mixing, visual observation of an operating assay cassette shows complete dispersement of the microbeads from the fluid in which the microbeads are originally present into the fluid that is being mixed with the fluid containing the microbeads.

The assay cassette is also configured such that, after all assay components have been mixed with the sample or sample portion, there is laminar flow of the mixed sample. 25 Components of the assay cassette that provide laminar flow, therefore, are preferably present in the cassette as the mixed sample leaves the final mixing chamber, e.g. the one that mixes liquid crystalline material with the sample (see component “5” in **Figure 5**). The laminar flow facilitates formation of the liquid crystalline material into an ordered arrangement after flow of the mixed sample into the detection chamber of the assay cassette. In contrast to turbulent flow, 30 as described above, in laminar flow, the fluid flows in smooth layers or lamina. This occurs

when adjacent fluid layers slide smoothly over one another with little mixing between layers. Vortices are not present. Generally, a Reynolds number of below approximately 2000 indicates laminar flow.

One preferred method of creating laminar flow in the inventive assay cassette is to provide a length of conduit, located between the detection chamber and the nearest mixing chamber, that is of a greater internal diameter than is the conduit present earlier in the flow path of the assay cassette (see component "5" in **Figure 5**). This conduit has no vortex-producing components. The effect of the larger diameter conduit, with no vortex-producing components, is to slow velocity of the flow of the mixed sample through the system, thus lessening and, preferably eliminating the turbulent flow established earlier in the system. Providing laminar flow before and as the mixed sample enters into the detection chamber provides for the liquid crystalline material, in absence of a ligand in the sample, to assume an ordered arrangement in the detection chamber in a minimal amount of time (i.e., preferably less than 30 minutes). An ordered arrangement of the liquid crystalline material can be visually observed.

In addition to the embodiment shown in **Figure 5**, other embodiments of the assay cassette are possible. Cassettes are preferably designed for single use and then to be disposed of. The cassettes may be designed such that they contain different sets of mixing chambers and detection chambers. That is, a cassette may have a single set of mixing chambers/detection chambers. Such a cassette is useful for determining whether a single, specific ligand is present in a sample. Other cassette designs may have multiple sets of mixing chambers/detection chambers, each set useful for determining the presence of a single ligand in the sample. Because such cassettes are able to test a sample for the presence of multiple ligands in the sample, they can efficiently test a sample for one of a number of ligands in a single assay. It is also possible that a sample contains multiple ligands. Such cassettes having multiple mixing chambers/detection chambers are useful for detecting and determining the identity of such ligands in a single assay.

Flow and Reader Devices

In order for the sample to flow through the assay cassette, a force is provided. The force providing for flow of the sample through the assay cassette device is preferably provided by a flow device located outside of the self-contained cassette. The flow device provides that the

sample movement through the assay cassette is automatic, meaning that once flow of the sample through the cassette is initiated, the operator need no longer monitor or control the process. In one embodiment, the flow devices have a compartment into which the assay cassette is inserted. Preferably, the compartment is shaped in such a way that the assay cassette (e.g., the trapezoidal shape in **Figure 5**) fits into the compartment in only one orientation. Such flow devices can provide this force in a variety of ways. In one embodiment, the flow device is an external pump that moves the sample through the device. In another embodiment, which is preferred when the assay cassette is of a collapsible design, the flow device is a roller that contacts one end of the assay cassette (i.e., the end containing the introduced sample) and then rolls over the length of the cassette, compressing the cassette as it goes, providing pressure that flows the sample along the length of the cassette, and then stopping rolling movement when the mixed sample has flowed into the detection chamber.

One such roller device is shown in **Figure 10**, functioning to move a sample through a collapsible assay cassette of the blister pack type, preferably as illustrated in **Figure 5**. Another such roller device is shown in **Figure 11**, functioning to move a sample through a collapsible assay cassette. The roller device illustrated in **Figure 10** moves the roller up until it compresses the sample chamber. On both sides of each mixing chamber of the cassette (**Figure 5**) are thin collapsible walls that rupture as the sample is flowed down the conduit by advancement of the roller. Rupture of the walls releases the assay component contained within the mixing chamber and the assay component then mixes with the sample. The roller stops when the mixed sample is flowed into the detection chamber.

The roller device illustrated in **Figure 11** is similar to the device shown in **Figure 10** except that the compression roller is of a different design. The multiple round surfaces on the surface of this particular compression roller are useful to provide a peristaltic type of sample flow. Like the earlier roller device, this device moves the roller up until it compresses the sample chamber. The sample is forced down the conduit as the roller slowly moves to the right. In progressive sequence, antibody, anti-antibody-coated microspheres and liquid crystal are added to and mixed with the sample. The roller stops when the mixed sample is delivered to the detection chamber.

30 Whatever force or device is used to provide for flow of the sample through the cassette,

the device must provide flow that results in mixing of the sample with the various assay components. That is, as described earlier, the sample flow at the point where mixing occurs is preferably turbulent. In addition, the force preferably moves the sample at a slow enough rate through the cassette to permit adequate levels of mixing. In addition, the force used to provide
5 for flow of the sample through the cassette must also provide for lack of turbulence (i.e., laminar flow) at and before the point where the mixed sample enters the detection chamber of the cassette device. As described earlier, laminar flow can be provided by increasing the interior diameter of the length of conduit that connects to the detection chamber. Another way of providing the laminar flow is to decrease the flow rate of the sample as it approaches the
10 detection chamber. Using the roller devices shown in **Figures 10 and 11**, for example, the decrease in sample flow rate is provided by slowing the rate at which the roller advances along the assay cassette. The lack of turbulence facilitates the liquid crystalline material in forming an ordered arrangement (i.e. no distortion) in the detection chamber in the absence of a ligand-antibody complex.

15 The roller device and its motion is preferably controlled by an instruction set, at least part of which has been pre-determined. For example, the program can be in the form of a microchip that contains instructions for directing the motion of the compression roller of the device in order to move or flow a sample through the assay cassette. In one embodiment, at least some instructions of the program can be modified by the user based, for example, on the particular
20 assay cassette that is being used, the force desired, and so forth. Some of the parameters of the roller device controlled by the program may be: the speed at which the compression roller moves along the assay cassette; changes in the speed during the run such as those changes providing turbulent flow and laminar flow; the force applied to the cassette and changes in the applied force; the position at which the compression rollers stop their motion along the cassette; the
25 particular cassette type and/or size which is to be used in the roller device; and other such parameters of the roller's movement.

Such a pre-programmed flow device, such as a pre-programmed roller device, provides for flow of a sample through an assay cassette in such a way that the sample or sample portion turbulently flows such that the sample portion is mixed with assay components, and also
30 provides for laminar flow of the mixed sample into the detection chamber of the assay cassette. The device may also provide for monitoring of various parameters of sample flow through the

cassette and, based on the monitoring, adjustment of various motions of the roller device based on the measured parameters. These pre-programming and feedback features of the device allow for minimal input from the operator in order to perform the assay and provides consistent, valid results.

5 In addition to a device that provides a force that moves the sample through the assay cassette, a reader device is provided. The reader device provides the light source, and light detectors (e.g., photodiodes) used to determine if a ligand bound to its receptor is present in the detection chamber of the assay cassette. The reader device may also provide the two light polarizers. The reader device can be a device separate from the flow device. The reader device
10 may also be incorporated into the flow device so a single unit both provides the force moving the sample through the assay cassette and also determines whether a ligand from the sample binds its receptor and is present in the detection chamber of the assay cassette.

Assay Components

15 Assay components comprise receptors for ligands (preferably antibodies), optional generally spherical particles (preferably microspheres), and liquid crystalline material.

Receptors

20 The receptors for ligands are capable of binding a specific ligand whose presence in a sample is sought to be determined. Receptors include but are not limited to proteins, such as specific biological receptors, antibodies or antibody fragments, peptides, bio- and non-
biopolymers, fatty acids, oligonucleotides such as DNA and RNA, natural and synthetic macromolecules and other molecules which are specific for and bind or interact with specific ligands. Examples of receptors include enzymes that recognize substrates and inhibitors; antibodies that bind antigens, antigens that recognize target antibodies, receptors that bind ligands, ligands that bind receptors, nucleic acid single-strand polymers that can bind to form
25 DNA-DNA, RNA-RNA, or DNA-RNA double strands, and synthetic molecules that interact with targeted ligands.

Receptors may be prepared using a variety of known techniques, including macromolecule synthesis, recombinant gene expression of biological macromolecules, antibody production and phage display. Phage display is a commonly used method for displaying a high

number of macromolecules such as peptides and proteins, including human antibodies and enzymes, on the surface of a small bacterial virus called a phage. This method permits screening of a large number of potential ligands in order to identify those compounds that bind with high affinity and high specificity to the phage-bound molecules. Using the phage display process,
5 receptors which are specific for target analytes, specifically known threat agents, are identified by generating one or more phage libraries which express the target analyte on the phage surface, screening the phage display libraries to select binding compounds with high affinity and high specificity to the target analyte, and producing and evaluating the selected binding compounds.
10 Phage display can be used in combination with one or more of the known methods for making receptors in order to select and confirm the most specific reagents which have the highest affinity for the target analyte.

Antibody reagents for detection of many pathogens of interest are commercially available, or can be conveniently produced from available hybridomas. Additionally, specific antibody or peptide receptors can be produced *de novo* using phage display or other protein engineering and expression technologies.
15

In a preferred embodiment, receptors are antibodies. Antibodies can be monoclonal antibodies, polyclonal antibodies, or even phage-displayed mono-specific antibodies. The antibodies preferably specifically bind to or are immunospecific for ligands that are part of, or attached to, a pathogenic agent or a toxin, for example.

20 The antibodies may or may not be attached to the surface of generally spherical particles, another optional assay component. If they are attached, the antibodies may be attached to the generally spherical particles in any manner known in the art, including chemical attachment and physical attachment. In one preferred embodiment, the receptors are attached to the spherical substrate by a chemical attachment, such as by covalent bonding to sulfate, amine, carboxyl or
25 hydroxyl groups imbedded in the spherical substrate.

If the antibodies are not attached to the generally spherical particles and generally spherical particles are used, then other receptors are present on the surface of the generally spherical particles, such receptors having the capability of binding to the antibodies that are not attached to the surface of the particles. Such receptors are anti-immunoglobulins, for example.

Generally Spherical Particles

The spherical particles are made from a material including, but not limited to, polymeric and inorganic materials. In one preferred embodiment, the substantially receptor-coated spherical substrate is comprised of a polymeric material. Suitable polymeric materials which 5 may comprise the spherical substrate include, but are not limited to, polyalkenes, polyacrylates, polymethacrylates, polyvinyls, polystyrenes, polycarbonates, polyesters, polyurethanes, polyamides, polyimides, polysulfones, polysiloxanes, polysilanes, polyethers, polycations, polyanions, and polycarboxylates. One particularly useful polymeric material used to manufacture the spherical substrate is polystyrene, especially when modified with copolymers of 10 acrylic ester, chloromethylstyrene, methylolamine, methyl methacrylate or made zwitterionic. If a polycation is utilized as the material of the spherical substrate, one particularly suitable polycation is poly (diallyldimethylammoniumchloride). In another embodiment, the substantially receptor-coated spherical substrate is made from an inorganic material. Suitable inorganic materials include, but are not limited to, glass, silicon, and colloidal gold. In one 15 preferred embodiment, the spherical substrate is a glass bead. The spherical particles are preferably microspheres. The spherical particles are preferably <1 µm in diameter.

Liquid Crystalline Material

Another assay component is liquid crystalline material. Liquid crystalline material is a material capable of forming a state of matter in which molecules exhibit some orientational order 20 (i.e., individual liquid crystalline molecules assume an ordered arrangement with respect to each other) but little positional order (i.e., the location of individual liquid crystalline molecules is not fixed). This property of intermediate ordering means that liquid crystals are neither solids (which possess both orientational and positional order) nor isotropic fluids (which exhibit no long-range order), but rather have properties between the two. Solid crystal or isotropic fluid can 25 be caused to transition into a liquid crystal by changing temperature (creating a thermotropic liquid crystal) or by using an appropriate diluting solvent to change the concentration of solid crystal (creating a lyotropic liquid crystal). In the present invention, the liquid crystalline material is used to produce and amplify a light signal due to the presence of ligand-receptor complexes.

30 A variety of types of liquid crystals can be used in the assay cassettes as long as the liquid

crystalline material does not dissolve or other wise affect the ability of the ligand in the sample to bind and form a complex with receptors. Surfactant lyotropic liquid crystals and thermotropic liquid crystals, therefore, are less preferable because these can dissolve ligands and/or receptors due to surfactant properties or temperature.

5 The liquid crystalline material preferred for use in the assay cassette includes lyotropic chromonic liquid crystalline material (LCLC) is used as the liquid crystalline material in the device of the present invention. The LCLC family embraces a range of dyes, drugs, nucleic acids, antibiotics, carcinogens, and anti-cancer agents. For a review of lyotropic chromonic liquid crystals see J. Lydon, Chromonics, in: Handbook of Liquid Crystals, Wiley-VCH, 10 Weinheim, vol. 2B, p. 981 (1998). Cromolyn is one LCLC that can be used in the assay cassettes of the present invention.

The Assay

15 The basis for the assay is that insertion of inclusion bodies in the bulk of a liquid crystal matrix drastically alters the optical properties of the liquid crystalline medium (i.e., detectable birefringence is produced by the foreign bodies). More specifically, the orientational order of the LCLC used in the cassettes is opaque to polarized light. The assay system is designed so that local orientational order of the liquid crystal is disrupted or distorted (i.e., the optical anisotropy is destroyed) by a ligand binding to its specific receptor. In this distorted state, at least some 20 polarized light passes through the liquid crystal. It is detection of this transmitted light that is the basis for detecting the presence of a ligand in a sample. The LCLC is used to detect and amplify this polarized light signal.

25 A schematic of the detection chamber, polarizing filters, light source and detector is shown in **Figure 9**. The setup consists of a light source (designated as “1” in **Figure 9**), an initial polarizer called the director (designated as “2” in **Figure 9**) , the detection chamber (designated as “3” in **Figure 9**) the secondary polarizer called the analyzer (designated as “4” in **Figure 9**) and the light detector (designated as “5” in **Figure 9**). As described earlier, the first, or director, polarizer is aligned such that light passing through the polarizer is aligned with the longitudinal axis of the detection chamber (i.e., along the “easy axis”), parallel to the microgrooves of the detection chamber, and in the same direction as flow of fluid into the 30 detection chamber. The second, or analyzer, polarizer is aligned perpendicular or 90° to the first

polarizer. So configured, the two polarizers are said to be "crossed."

In operation, the detection chamber contains the mixed sample (sample mixed with receptor, optional microspheres, and liquid crystalline material). In one instance, the mixed sample, containing the liquid crystalline material, does not contain complexes between ligands 5 and receptors. In a second instance, the mixed sample containing the liquid crystalline material does contain complexes between ligands and receptors.

In the situation where there are no complexes, a stream of light from the light source contacts the first, director polarizer. The light that emerges or passes through the polarizer is linearly polarized in the direction of the microgrooves in the detection chamber. The polarized 10 light then is transmitted through the ordered liquid crystal in the detection chamber. The transmitted light then contacts the second, analyzer polarizer. Because there were no ligand-receptor complexes present in the liquid crystal, the liquid crystal orientation is not disrupted and thus light cannot be transmitted through the liquid crystal. The light emerging from the liquid 15 crystal in the detection chamber is, therefore, unable to pass through the second, analyzer light polarizer which is 90° to the director. Since no light passes through the second polarizer, there is no light contacting the light detector of the system.

In the situation where there are complexes between ligand and receptor present in the liquid crystal mixture, the result is different (see **Figure 13**). In that case, a stream of light from the light source also contacts the first polarizer. The light emerging from the first polarizer is 20 polarized in the direction of the microgrooves in the detection chamber, as in the first example. However, when the linearly polarized light contacts the distorted liquid crystal surrounding the complexes within the detection chamber, at least some of the light is transmitted. The complexes, which contain ligand bound to receptor (e.g., an antigen-antibody complex), or a 25 ligand-receptor complex bound by one or more microspheres, causes a local distortion in the orientational order of the liquid crystal in the vicinity of the complex. The presence of these distortions of the liquid crystal permits transmission of light. This transmitted, extra-ordinary, light passes through the second polarizer. The light crossing the second polarizer contacts the light detector and is measured as a light signal. The light signal indicates presence of ligands in 30 the sample that were bound by the specific receptor. The light signal can be quantified and can be correlated with the concentration of ligands in the sample.

In the system described above, the size of the aggregate (i.e., ligand plus receptor) is preferably at least 2 μm in diameter in order to provide for light transmission through the detection chamber. Generally, ligands of approximately 1 μm in diameter, when bound with an antibody receptor provides for an aggregate in the range of 2 μm in diameter. Preferably,
5 however, microspheres of up to approximately 1 μm in diameter, which are capable of binding to the receptors, are also provided. Ligands and receptors complex to form aggregates and the resulting aggregates distort the orientational order of a liquid crystal. Addition of such microspheres increases the sensitivity of the system by increasing the size of the aggregates and causing increased distortion of the liquid crystal. For example, in the case where such
10 microspheres are used, a ligand of approximately 1 μm in diameter binds to antibody receptors and produces a complex or aggregate of approximately 2 μm in diameter. One or more microspheres, each approximately 1 μm in diameter, then binds to the receptors bound to the ligand. When this occurs a complex of even larger size is produced. Such larger complexes amplify transmission of polarized light through the liquid crystal.

15 The system described above using a detection chamber of the approximate dimensions as shown in **Figure 8**, provides for detection of approximately 10^4 ligands per ml of initial sample. Concentration of the initial sample is able to provide more sensitivity of the system.

Sample Collection and Preprocessing

20 The sample which is introduced into the assay cassette is collected from the environment or is collected from a human or animal subject. The sample is either a dry, non-liquid sample or a liquid sample. If the sample is not liquid, or if the sample is liquid but in a small volume (e.g., less than 0.1 ml), in one embodiment the volume of the sample is increased to at least 0.2 ml by addition of sterile water or other biological buffer.

25 The sample is then treated to remove any material of an approximate size larger than 1 μm in diameter. Particles of a size larger than this can cause distortion of the liquid crystal in the absence of receptor binding to ligand. This increases background signal and decreases sensitivity of the system.

There are a variety of methods for removing material larger than 1 μm from the sample. In one method, the sample is centrifuged at a force that is not large enough to cause

microorganisms or other ligands (e.g., of around 1-2 μm in diameter) to be removed from solution, but is large enough to cause material larger than 2 μm in diameter to be removed. Alternatively, the sample is passed through a prefilter having a pore size of larger than approximately 1 μm . The sample, which has been either centrifuged or passed through a 5 prefilter, is then passed through a filter having a pore size of less than 2 μm . Matter larger than the pore size is trapped on the filter. The material trapped on the filter is discarded.

An example of a device that can be used for this purpose is shown in **Figure 12**. The sample is first passed through a large pore filter (1.5 μm pores) to remove large particulates and then passed through a second filter device (0.22 μm pore size) to remove excess volume). As is 10 shown in **Figure 12**, the ligand that is to be introduced into the assay cassette is trapped on the second filter and then removed from the filter by back-flushing the filter with a smaller than original volume. The resulting fully-treated, concentrated sample is then introduced into the assay cassette to determine the presence of specific ligands therein.

Other methods for preprocessing the sample before introduction into the cassette can be 15 used.

The disclosure of all patents, patent applications (and any patents which issue thereon, as well as any corresponding published foreign patent applications), and publications mentioned throughout this description are hereby incorporated by reference herein. It is expressly not admitted, however, that any of the documents incorporated by reference herein teach or disclose 20 the present invention.

It should be understood that every maximum numerical limitation given throughout this specification will include every lower numerical limitation, as if such lower numerical limitations were expressly written herein. Every minimum numerical limitation given throughout this specification will include every higher numerical limitation, as if such higher 25 numerical limitations were expressly written herein. Every numerical range given throughout this specification will include every narrower numerical range that falls within such broader numerical range, as if such narrower numerical ranges were all expressly written herein.

While particular embodiments of the subject invention have been described, it will be obvious to those skilled in the art that various changes and modifications of the subject invention

can be made without departing from the spirit and scope of the invention. In addition, while the present invention has been described in connection with certain specific embodiments thereof, it is to be understood that this is by way of illustration and not by way of limitation and the scope of the invention is defined by the appended claims which should be construed as broadly as the prior art will permit.

EXAMPLES

The invention may be better understood by reference to the following examples, which serve to illustrate but not to limit the present invention.

10 Example 1. Making a detection chamber

Biosensor assays were conducted in chambers created by using mylar (20 μm) spacers to separate two parallel glass slides (25 mm). Before chamber assembly, the optical quality glass (Fisher Scientific, Pittsburgh, PA) slides were cleaned (sonicated in 1% Alconox in distilled water for 10 min at 60°C), air dried in a clean room, and spin coated at 1500 rpm with 3% v/v polyimide SE-7511 (Nissan Chemical, Japan). The slides were dried at 100°C for 2 min and baked at 180°C for 1 hr to form a polyimide film (\approx 380 nm thick) on one surface. The treated surface was rubbed with felt (1/8 inch felt; 10 in/sec; 0.12 lb/in²) to create parallel microgrooves in the polyimide. The direction of the microgrooves functions to uniformly align the liquid crystal in the chamber. Assay chambers were constructed by sandwiching a mixed sample between two slides that were coated, rubbed and aligned in an anti-parallel fashion. The distance between the slides was fixed with mylar (3M, St. Paul, MN) spacers (20 μm) located at the cassette edges. When filled, the chambers were sealed with epoxy.

20 Example 2. Creating artificial aggregates

The model ligand used was a fluorescent-labeled (Dragon Green fluor), antigen coated (streptavidin) latex bead (Bangs Laboratories, Inc., Fishers, IN). The size of an individual bead was 0.56 μm Anti-streptavidin antibody (1.0 $\mu\text{g}/\text{ml}$; Rochland, Inc., Gilbertsville, PA) was mixed with the streptavidin-coated beads to create immune aggregates that would cause birefringence. Experimentally, beads, antibody or immune aggregates were added to liquid crystal to create a final LCLC concentration of 13% cromolyn (CAS#: 15826-37-6; Spectrum

Chemical Mfg. Corp.; Gardena, CA) in deionized water (w/w). The stock solution of cromolyn was filtered (0.2 μm) to remove undissolved particles and impurities. The 13% cromolyn had a thermal stability, as measured by Differential Scanning Calorimetry (Perkin Elmer DSC7, Shelton, CT) between 2°C and 22°C.

5 Example 3. Analysis of aggregates

Sample filled cassettes were evaluated using a confocal microscope (Olympus Flowview; Ar laser excitation at 488 nm; power <1 μW ; 40x objective had a NA = 0.6; pinhole aperture = 100 μm). Fluorescent light from the focal plane in the LCLC cassette passed through the pinhole and was divided and directed into two different detection channels by the beam splitter. The 3-dimensional location of the fluorescently labeled bead was detected by a photo-multiplier tube. The image was simultaneously evaluated by transmission-mode polarizing microscopy (PM) to measure the intensity of light I_{PM} that passed through the polarizer (P), LCLC cassette, and analyzer (A). Simultaneous confocal and polarizing microscopy allowed correlation of the immune aggregates with the associated director distortions in the surrounding LCLC.

15 Experimentally, the polarizer was aligned along the easy axis of the LC in the cassette. The analyzer was then oriented perpendicular (+90°) to the polarizer and light was applied. The data shown in **Figures 14** and **15** demonstrate that inclusion bodies must exceed a critical diameter (see below) before distortion of the LCLC is sufficient to permit detectable transmission of light.

20 As shown in **Figure 14**, immune complexes observed in the confocal mode were detected by fluorescent markers (A, C and E). The polarizing-mode textures of the same regions (B, D and F) depended on the size of complexes. Complexes (as well as individual non-reacted beads and antibodies) smaller than 2 microns in diameter did not cause noticeable light transmission through the crossed polarizers and the LCLC sample, $I_{PM} \approx 0$. In contrast, complexes larger 25 than 2 microns produced noticeable light transmission caused by director distortions in the surrounding LCLC matrix. Note that the director distortions caused by immune complexes of size $d > d_c$ are much larger than d (compare A and F). In control samples, non-reacted antibodies and antigens did not cause noticeable light transmittance in polarizing-microscope observations.

Figure 15 shows that the intensity of transmitted light increased with the size of

complexes once the complexes become larger than $d_c \approx 2\mu m$. Complexes (or individual beads) of size $d < d_c$ did not influence the background transmission (which is always present because of the static and dynamic fluctuations of the LCLC director). Each data point represents an immune complex that was first detected and characterized by fluorescence microscopy. The 5 (average) complex diameter was measured using an eyepiece micrometer. Then the polarizing-microscope mode was used to measure and normalize the intensity of light passing through a 50 $\mu m \times 50 \mu m$ area of LCLC cassette with the identified complex at the center of it. The normalized light intensity I_N was determined by the formula $I_N = \frac{I_t - I_b}{I_b - \bar{I}_b}$, where I_t is the light 10 intensity transmitted through the 50 $\mu m \times 50 \mu m$ area with the director distortions caused by the complex, I_b is light intensity transmitted through the 50 $\mu m \times 50 \mu m$ area of an unperturbed (uniform) part of the same sample, and \bar{I}_b is the transmittance through the same uniform area rotated by 5° with respect to the polarizer. The quantity I_N is normalized by the uniform bright field and reflects the relative amplitude (angle β) of director distortions.

It should be noted that the threshold-like feature of transmittance vs. size dependence 15 allows tuning of the detection system when a variety of parameters change (cassette thickness, alignment layer, type of LCLC or the microbes, value of d_c , etc.).

Example 4. Detection of bacterial and viral immune aggregates

The biosensor system was tested against bacteria (*Escherichia coli* k99, # 31616) and 20 against virus (Vaccinia virus, VR-1354) obtained from the American Type Culture Collection, Herndon, VA. The activity and specificity of commercially available anti-*E. coli* monoclonal antibody (K99, Denka-Seiken; Tokyo, Japan) and anti-vaccinia polyclonal antibody (ANAWA Biomedical Services & Products; Tokyo, Japan) were confirmed in the laboratory before use.

For the bacterial study, *E. coli* was grown (37°C) to late log phase in nutrient broth (Becton Dickinson, Sparks, MD), washed twice with sterile phosphate-buffered saline (pH 7.2, 25 PBS) and resuspended in PBS (10^8 bacteria/ml). Bacteria (2×10^6 *E. coli*) were added to 20 ng of anti-*E. coli* antibody, gently mixed, added to LCLC (12% final cromolyn concentration) and incubated for two minutes at room temperature. PBS was substituted for bacteria or antibody in control reactions. Cassettes were assembled using 8 μm Mylar spacers and viewed by polarizing

microscopy as described earlier.

The results showed that the aggregated *E. coli* distorted the surrounding LCLC to produce detectable birefringent spots (**Figure 16A**), as compared with non-aggregated bacterial or antibody control (**Figures 16B** and **16C**).

5 Similar birefringent areas formed around viral immune aggregates (1.8×10^3 virions plus 20 ng antibody) embedded in 13% cromolyn (**Figure 17A**). Neither individual virions (**Figure 17A**) nor antibody (**Figure 17B**) caused birefringence in the 13% cromolyn. The lyotropic chromonic liquid crystal functioned as an effective and rapid biosensor.